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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 000380

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA DART SITUATION REPORT 5 - BORDER
CLOSURE

NAIROBI 00000380 001.2 OF 003

SUMMARY

¶1. On January 3, the Government of Kenya (GOK) officially closed the Kenya-Somalia border, preventing displaced people from crossing into Kenya and relief supplies from transiting into Somalia. Liboi, El Wak, and Mandera on the Kenya side of the border are main transit points for refugees and relief supplies. As of January 18, several UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have humanitarian supplies stuck in the Kenyan border towns of El Wak and Mandera. The longer the border remains closed, the more difficult it will be for them to implement humanitarian programs in Somalia.

¶2. The USG Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) has contacted humanitarian agencies that have been affected by the two-week closure and report the following highlights from these discussions. End Summary.

DISPLACED PERSONS AND REFUGEES

¶3. On January 17, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expressed continued concern for the displaced population in Doble, Somalia, that has been prevented from crossing the border to the Liboi transit center. Estimates of this population range between 4,000 and 14,000 people; verification of their numbers and basic needs can not take place without cross-border access. UNHCR fears

that some of the population is in need of medical attention, including some Doble residents who would normally seek medical care in Liboi.

¶4. As a result of the border closure, the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya have not received new Somali refugees since January 3. In 2006, Daadab received approximately 32,000 Somali refugees bringing the camp population to more than 171,000 people, of which 98 percent are Somali and the other 2 percent are Eritrean, Ethiopian, Tanzanian, and Congolese. UNHCR continues to negotiate with the GOK and Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to allow humanitarian access to Doble.

¶5. Additionally, UNHCR reports that as of January 18, the joint GOK and UN assessment mission that was scheduled to assess humanitarian access and conditions of displaced people along the border has been postponed indefinitely. The humanitarian community fears the border is unlikely to be officially re-opened in the near future. UNHCR Rep Gedalof called on the Ambassador January 18 to request additional USG intervention with the GOK. The Ambassador told Gedalof he would write to both Ministers Tuju and Michuki urging them to ?green light? the GOK-UN joint assessment mission.

TRANSPORT OF HUMANITARIAN SUPPLIES

¶6. UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have had increasing difficulty in transporting supplies into Somalia and reloading trucks from Somalia with supplies in Kenya. WFP and UNICEF both report that permission to cross the border for humanitarian vehicles is unpredictable. (The DART notes that this is likely linked to the security situation.) According to WFP from January 8 to 18, the Liboi border has

NAIROBI 00000380 002.2 OF 003

opened up to allow transit of trucks carrying relief commodities into Somalia, while Mandera and El Wak crossings have become more restricted.

¶7. On January 12, six relief trucks crossed into Somalia from El Wak. However, empty WFP trucks continue to wait on the Somalia side for entry and reloading in Kenya. Reportedly, the trucks are not allowed to re-enter Kenya because the Somali drivers can not be screened by GOK security officials. On January 18, WFP reported that 40 trucks are stuck on the Somali side of the border unable to cross into Kenya to load 3,500 metric tons (MT) food, including cereals, pulses, corn-soy blend, and oil from El Wak warehouses in Kenya that is scheduled for distribution in Gedo Region in Somalia.

¶8. On January 14, three humanitarian trucks were permitted to cross into Somalia at Liboi. The WFP convoy carrying 1,000 MT of WFP food had been stuck between Liboi and Doble for several days before permission was granted for the convoy to proceed into Somalia.

¶9. Additionally, WFP reported that two UNCAS contracted trucks with 307 drums of jet 1-A fuel are stuck in Mandera, Kenya. The trucks are en route to Wajid Airport in Somalia, where UNCAS has only 16 drums of fuel remaining. Without a resupply of fuel to Wajid in the next two days humanitarian flights will be impacted. WFP, UNICEF, WHO, UNCAS, and World Vision all have trucks stuck at the Kenya side of the border in Mandera.

¶10. In the last year, WFP has used contracting agencies that are responsible for transshipment, storage, and handling of commodities at the border.

Transporters are increasingly concerned about the lack of security en route, particularly as they pass through areas with a power vacuum or ongoing fighting. Additionally, the contractors make grow tired of waiting for the border to open and seek employment elsewhere, further complicating WFP's operations.

¶11. On January 18, UNICEF reported that seven trucks carrying relief supplies including 3,000 water containers, 10 water bladders, and office equipment have not been able to proceed through the Mandera, Kenya, border crossing for transit to Baidoa since January 13. UNICEF has requested UN Development Program's (UNDP) support in advocating with the GOK for permission to allow these supplies to be transported. Water containers and bladders are critically needed to provide safe drinking water for flood-affected communities in Bay Region.

¶12. At a January 16, Rift Valley fever (RVF) task force meeting in Nairobi, WHO reported that human samples taken from suspected RVF patients in Somalia were unable to be transported by road to laboratories in Kenya for confirmation, instead the samples were rerouted to Mogadishu and flown to Kenya. Health agencies raised concerns about transporting medical supplies and technical staff who are needed to train animal and human health care workers on RVF prevention and surveillance techniques.

¶13. USAID partner International Medical Corps (IMC)

NAIROBI 00000380 003.2 OF 003

reported that they have not been able to bring medical supplies from Kenya for use in Belet Weyne, Somalia. Although IMC has pre-positioned medicine and nutrition supplies in the areas where they work, they need to restock health and feeding program supplies. Additionally, the border closure has prevented IMC from transporting biological samples needed to analyze the current diarrhea outbreak from Belet Weyne to Nairobi.

¶14. CARE staff and commodities for programs in Gedo Region in Somalia are located in Mandera. In December, CARE distributed two-month food rations to their caseload there. CARE does not have a distribution scheduled for January, but will need to distribute food again in February, which will be hampered if the border does not re-open.

CONCLUSIONS

¶15. After two weeks of official border closure, the humanitarian impact is beginning to be felt. With a prolonged closure, aid agencies will have to develop contingency plans to ensure uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian assistance. In the foreseeable future, aid agencies transporting supplies across the Kenya-Somalia border will have to cope with unpredictable border regulations and adapt accordingly. In the worst case scenario, air transport options may be adopted by some agencies, which will dramatically increase operational costs.

¶16. When the Somalia-Kenya border re-opens, thousands of refugees are likely to arrive in Kenya at Liboi or other transit stations. WFP and UNHCR have already developed contingency plans for this scenario. However, a large influx will stress agencies' resources, especially in Dadaab camp.

¶17. The DART will continue to monitor the status of the Somalia-Kenya border and the transport of humanitarian supplies.

RANNEBERGER